

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Background

A successful Community Development Strategy (CDS) for Rockland must account for the Town's history, its place in the regional economy, and the market forces that continuously shape growth and change throughout the South Shore. Incorporated in 1874, Rockland is among the state's 41 communities that were established between 1850 and 1900 as a direct result of industrialization. Its industrial roots can still be seen in the architectural styles and compact form of the downtown area and adjacent neighborhoods, where a small grid of linear, interconnected streets once brought workers within walking distance of their jobs. Today, the physical evolution of Rockland center is recognized in part by the Lower Union Street National Register District. As the town seal attests, Rockland's first recognizable boundaries were determined by a land grant (Hatherly) in 1656, and until its incorporation, Rockland was part of neighboring Abington. Like most towns that seceded from others during the late

19th century, Rockland is fairly small, with a total area of just 10.1 square miles. It is also more densely developed than most South Shore communities, and its population density per square mile ranks fourth highest in Plymouth County. Rockland's working-class origins have played a major role in its development history, for the Town remains one of the region's lowest-income communities. It also offers the region's most affordably priced homes, enabling many of its 6,500 households to find housing in a conspicuously expensive part of the state.

Contemporary Rockland is much different from the small town memorialized in its National Register District, and Rockland has changed considerably in the past 30 years. Relative to other mid-South Shore towns, Rockland has experienced significant housing growth and during the 1990s, its housing growth rate (16%) surpassed that of all adjacent communities except Hanover. In contrast, its population barely changed from 1970-1990, and its 9.6% population increase over the past decade falls at about the middle of the state as a whole. As Rockland has grown, the make-up of its households has changed dramatically. This explains the seeming disparity between Rockland's high rate of housing growth and low rate of population growth. Moreover, the economic position of its households has declined, for Rockland experienced an *absolute* decrease in median household income from 1990-2000 and its statewide household income rank dropped from 182 to 219. In a concurrent trend, Rockland has found it increasingly difficult to attract and retain businesses and high-quality jobs. Unlike Rockland workers of a century ago, the vast majority of today's workers (82%) commute to non-local employment. These conditions have siphoned activity away from downtown Rockland and gradually depleted the district's once-vital retail base.

Rockland's Community Development Strategy consists of four major parts. Part I lays out the four **Major Strategies** that form the foundation of the CDS – Economic Development and Downtown Revitalization, Public Infrastructure and Community Facilities, Social Services, and Housing. Part II describes **Key Elements of CDS Implementation** – Community Outreach and Participation and the Community Development Target Area. Part III discusses the CDS's **Relationship to the Commonwealth's Sustainable**

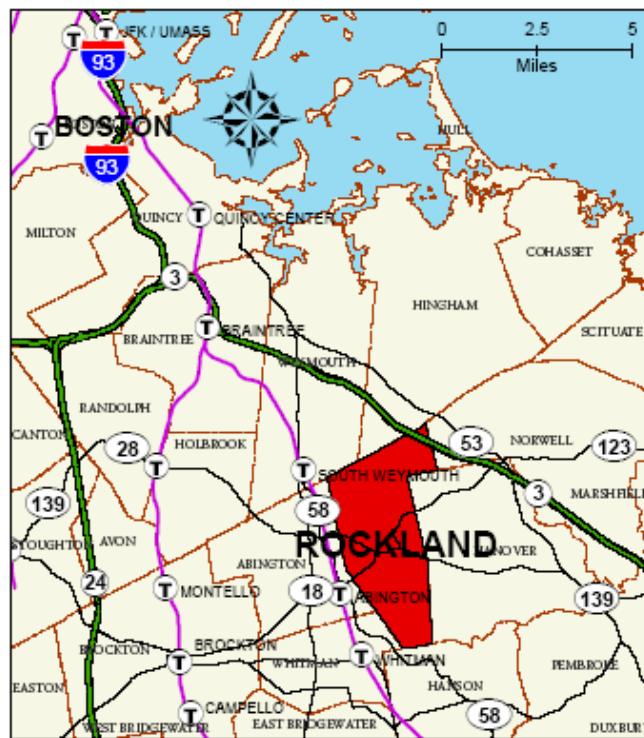


Fig. 1. Locus Map

Development Principles. Part IV presents Rockland's **Priority List for Projects/Activities** with a projected timeline to guide the Town in the implementation of its CDS.

Part I. Major Strategies:

The CDS draws on Rockland's principle planning documents in the identification of its Major Strategies. The Town of Rockland Master Plan (1999) is comprehensive in scope and addresses all planning elements required by M.G.L. c.41, S. 81D. Consistent with EOEA's Division of Conservation Service (DCS) guidelines, the Open Space & Recreation Plan (2004) focuses on water policy and natural resources, recreational amenities and open space, and the E.O. 418 Community Development Plan (2004) examines Rockland's housing and economic development needs. Together, the three plans reinforce shared ideas and function compatibly to guide Rockland's near-term development policies, thus forming the basis for Rockland's CDS. The following Major Strategies synthesize key goals from each of these recent plans.

Housing

Rockland's lack of available land, existing zoning and land use policies, and regional market pressures make it difficult to provide affordable housing for existing residents and those priced out of the market in affluent, neighboring communities such as Norwell, Hingham or Hanover. The Town's main housing goal is to preserve the quality and affordability of its existing housing stock through rehabilitation – a goal that also supports Rockland's interest in historic preservation. The best strategy to achieve this goal is to establish a housing rehabilitation program. Rehabilitating housing that is in poor condition will allow Rockland residents to be able to afford to remain in their homes and maintain them for years to come. Pursuing this strategy is particularly important in Rockland, where 57% of all low- or moderate-income homeowners pay more for housing than they can afford (HUD, CHAS 2000). The Town's high incidence of homeowner housing cost burden underscores the need for subsidized housing rehabilitation: these families cannot absorb the additional cost of extraordinary maintenance and repairs. Rockland plans to fund the rehabilitation of existing housing by using federal, state, quasi-public and private financing sources.

A second housing strategy is to revise the existing zoning bylaw to encourage housing that fits with the Town's expressed vision and goals. As noted in Rockland's Master Plan and Community Development Plan, zoning regulations need to be written to guide development toward areas with existing infrastructure, with increased density downtown and a mix of uses near transit and with access to sewer service. In the past 30 years, residential development in Rockland has extended into outlying, once-rural areas (Fig. 2). Revised zoning that promotes Smart Growth and curbs sprawl will help the town preserve its historic built assets and protect its remaining open space. Toward these ends, Rockland plans to seek funds from programs such as EOEA's Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant or CHAPA's Smart Growth Initiative. A third strategy is

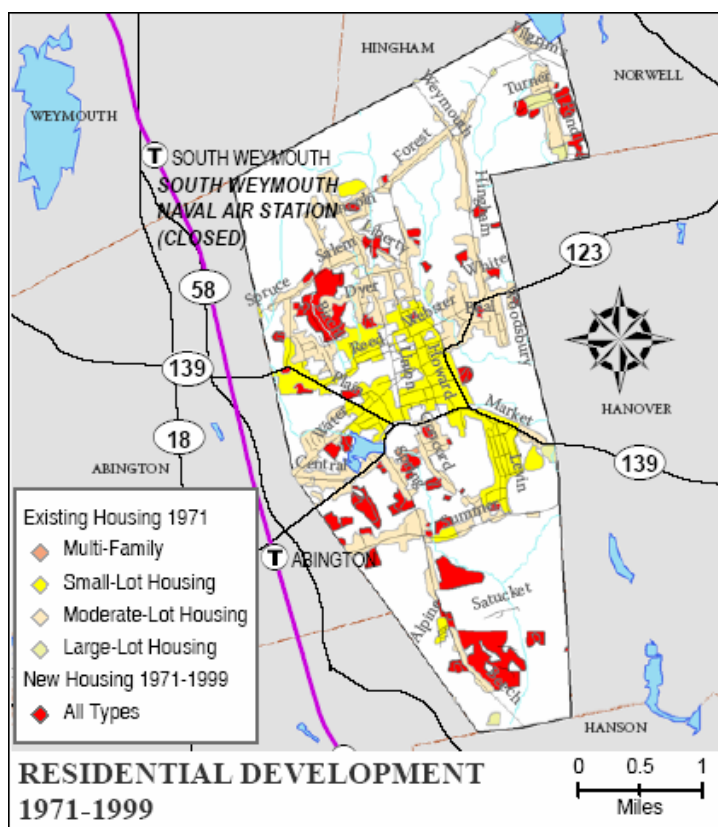


Fig. 2. Since 1971, development in Rockland has occurred primarily in outlying sections of town: south of Route 139, north of Route 123, and near the Norwell town line. This is the pattern of sprawl that the CDS is designed to reverse, primarily through new zoning.

to monitor expiring use restrictions. Rockland currently has two rental developments that do not have perpetual affordability restrictions: 18 units at Church Street and Union Street (downtown) and the 204-unit Rockland Place, a comprehensive permit development on Memorial Drive. The Town will seek technical assistance from CHAPA and financial resources from DHCD and MassHousing to preserve the affordability of these developments and prevent their loss from the Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory.

Economic Development and Downtown Revitalization

Rockland's Master Plan examines several economic development needs and opportunities to address them. It details strategies to encourage appropriately located industrial, commercial, and retail development in order to revitalize the downtown area, improve the tax base, and provide employment, shopping, and services.

Rockland's strategies for economic development and downtown revitalization support the growth of new and existing local businesses to achieve economic vitality in the central business district.

A primary strategy to meet Rockland's economic development needs is to redevelop vacant parcels and reuse older, industrial buildings for a mix of commercial and residential uses. One of the key steps in this process—conducting an inventory of blighting conditions in the downtown area—has been completed. The downtown area also needs an economic analysis and market study to determine the kinds of residential and nonresidential uses for which the existing space is most suitable, and a realistic plan to attract investors and businesses. A challenging aspect of downtown revitalization will involve strengthening residential property values in adjacent neighborhoods and preserving housing affordability for the area's predominantly low-income population. Further, Rockland will study ways to increase the supply of

downtown parking in appropriate locations, and explore including downtown in the Economic Target Area so Rockland can spur investment through TIF agreements. Downtown revitalization will attract businesses, create jobs and enhance the tax base. The Town will look to fund these endeavors from multiple sources such as CDBG, CDAG, Urban Renewal, MassDevelopment, LISC, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, PWED and other public programs.

Social Services

Rockland's social service strategy centers on meeting the needs of its youth, families, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities. The top priority is to ensure that youth receive a superior education, whether academic or vocational. To meet this goal, Rockland needs a consistent commitment of state Chapter 70 funding because the Town has no reserves to fill gaps left by shortfalls in local aid. While Rockland High School far exceeds the state mean for percentage of graduates attending 2- and 4-year public colleges, its families cannot afford private school tuitions, and the Town cannot fund its schools at the level required to

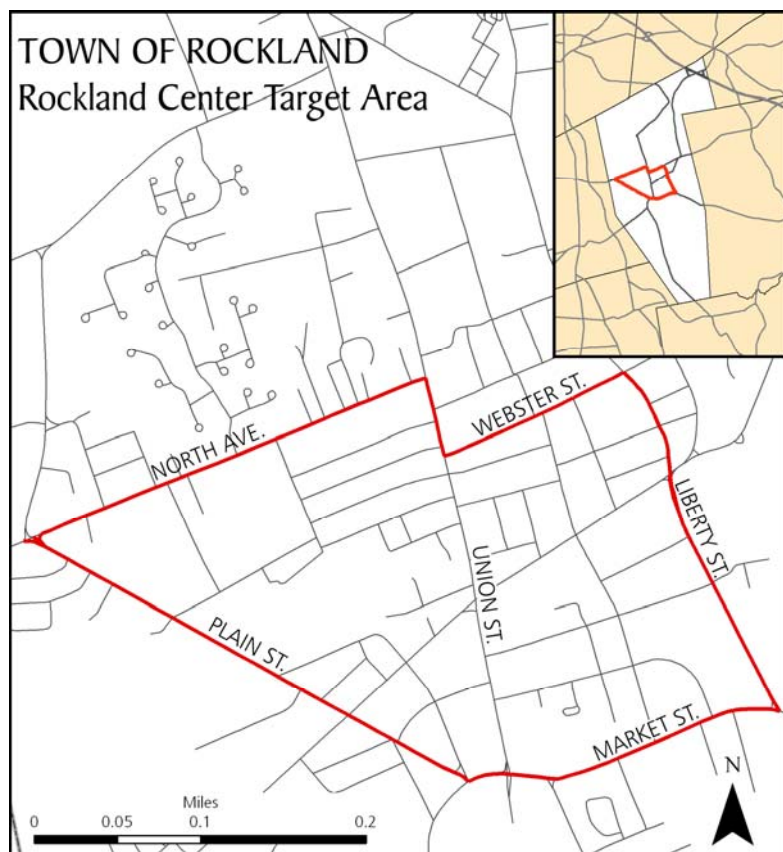


Fig. 3. The Rockland Center Target Area

compete with wealthy towns. For Rockland High School students entering the workforce after graduation, high-quality job readiness and vocational training are also critical needs. School-business partnerships to offer internships, summer employment and other job training will help non college-bound youth prepare for the workforce. However, the need for job training also extends to Rockland's adults, and neither the property tax levy nor local aid from the state can address this need. A strategy to meet adult educational needs is to create linkages to job training/retraining resources and agencies with adult education and job readiness programs. Another Town goal is to make all town facilities accessible to persons with disabilities.

Rockland has many critical social service programs in place at its Community Center, including the Council on Aging, the Senior Center with more than thirty programs and activities, Head Start and daycare programs, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program and the North River Culinary Program, which provides job training in the restaurant industry to troubled teens and creates many of the meals provided to Rockland seniors.

Public Infrastructure, Community Facilities and Services

Rockland seeks to maintain excellent public schools, improve existing infrastructure and facilities, and reinvest in established neighborhoods. Given its chronic fiscal constraints, Rockland needs to find ways to improve the quality and capacity of services, such as a new satellite fire station or improvements to the Community Center, while protecting lower-income homeowners from tax bills they cannot afford. Although at one point Rockland's average tax bill fell below the state median, this is no longer the case. Since 1997, homeowners in Rockland have consistently paid tax bills that exceed the state median. Over time, its tax base has become increasingly residential. This is due not only to housing growth but also to Rockland's weak economy. For example, its industrial property values did not recover to pre-recession (1989) levels until four years ago. While Rockland needs a strong, diverse tax base, it has critical financial management and planning needs. A major strategy for Rockland is to develop a capital improvements plan (CIP) that identifies, prioritizes and establishes funding mechanisms for capital projects. A CIP and pavement management plan will help the Town coordinate resources and interdepartmental communication. With a prioritized inventory of needed improvements, the Town can pursue additional funding options such as MPPF, EDA, RRD, SBAB, CDBG and various public safety grants. In addition, the CIP can illuminate ways to pool resources such as housing youth and senior programs in shared facilities and participating in regionalized purchasing in order to achieve cost savings.

Part II: Key Elements of CDS Implementation

Community Outreach and Participation

Rockland is committed to inclusive decision-making that seeks consensus among stakeholders and residents. The Board of Selectmen has traditionally led community planning initiatives in Rockland. Some or all of Rockland's volunteer boards—notably the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, Parks Department, Recreation Commission and Public Works/Water and Sewer Commission, as well as municipal staff—often participate in the planning process. As necessary, the Board of Selectmen uses local appropriations to purchase professional assistance to help community members realize their planning goals and objectives.

Pursuant to the FY10 Draft One-Year Action Plan, the Town of Rockland scheduled public participation sessions two (2) months prior to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development's deadline for Community Development Fund application submission. A public forum to discuss and update the Town's Community Development Strategy was held Monday, December 7, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. The session was advertised by posting notices in Town Hall, the Library, the Post Office, the Community Center, two target area banks and on local cable television as well as through a direct mailing to applicants on the Housing

Rehabilitation Program waiting list. As a result of this public participation session the CDS was updated, the current target area was reaffirmed and the list of priority activities was updated.

The CDS was also discussed with the Board of Selectmen at an advertised public hearing on Monday, January 4, 2010, in preparation for this grant application. An updated version of the CDS was supplied to the Board prior to the meeting and was available to those attending the public hearing. At that time, the Board reviewed the Town's Community Development Strategy, discussed the previously stated goals that Rockland had accomplished as well as new challenges the Town is facing. At this meeting the Board of Selectmen unanimously voted to approve the CDS, as amended, for submission as part of the Town's FY10 Community Development Fund application.

Community Development Target Area

The Town will continue to target community development efforts in the Rockland Center Target Area, which was designated when it submitted its FY 2006 CDF application. The Rockland Center Target Area is defined as follows: starting at the intersection of Webster and Union Streets follow Union Street north to North Avenue, follow North Avenue to Plain Street, follow Plain Street to Market Street, follow Market Street to Liberty Street, follow Liberty Street to Webster Street and follow Webster Street back to the intersection with Union Street. Both sides of the border streets mentioned above are considered to be in the target area. The target area is wholly contained within Census Tract 5021.01 although it does not encompass the entire tract. This target area was selected for several reasons: it contains a majority of the Town's oldest (pre-1939) housing stock, it contains a large percentage of multi-family structures (approximately 47%), it encompasses the traditional central business district along Union Street, it captures the Lower Union Street National Register District, it is home to a high-percentage of LMI households, and it represents the most densely populated area of town. (See Fig 3. *Rockland Center Target Area map.*)

An additional element of the rationale for the boundaries of the Rockland Center Target Area is that the area contains a significant stretch of Union Street, Rockland's "main street." Union Street is host to the municipal facilities (Town Hall, Library and Community Center/Senior Center), centers of worship (Catholic, Congregationalist and Baptist churches), and institutional uses (Rockland Trust and Rockland Federal Credit Union) that bring citizens to the downtown. The Board of Selectmen consider reestablishing a viable commercial environment along Union Street to complement these other uses an integral aspect of the Town's overall economic and community development. Union Street represents one of the oldest "ways" in Rockland, and it makes sense for it to represent the "spine" of the Rockland Center Target Area.

Part III: Community Development Strategy's Relationship to the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles

The CDS emphasizes concentrating development and mixing uses, which is why much of the focus is on the central business district (CBD) and older neighborhoods. The focus on this target area is also consistent with advance equity, which will result in reducing the disparity among lower income residents in the downtown (CBD) and the rest of town. By leading with public reinvestment to improve deteriorated infrastructure, the CDS will encourage a favorable environment to stimulate private reinvestment; it will expand housing opportunities by promoting the rehabilitation of existing units, and returning vacant housing and former commercial buildings to productive use. The CDS also will help preserve the diversity of Rockland's housing stock as it is well suited to a variety of types of households. In addition, the Community Development Strategy will improve transportation choice by encouraging the rehabilitation of public infrastructure, making it possible for walkers, bikers and those who use wheelchairs to have safe access to modes of transportation other than the auto. The town will protect land and ecosystems by reviewing land development proposals in light of existing road systems. The CDS also recommends strategies for using natural resources wisely and

promotes *protecting land and ecosystems* through the development of parks and recreation areas and the preservation of open space.

The strategies discussed in the CDS are recommendations that Rockland is committed to following to ensure the existing neighborhoods are enhanced in a manner that results in positive growth for the *region* as well as the Town. The CDS will help the Town *make efficient decisions* because it is consistent with locally developed plans, including the Master Plan, Open Space & Recreation Plan and Community Development Plan, along with MAPC's MetroFuture and state initiatives such as the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Sustainable Development Principles	Community Development Strategy			
	A. Housing	B. Economic Development and Downtown Revitalization	C. Social Services	D. Public Infrastructure, Community Facilities And Services
<i>Concentrate Develop and Mix Uses</i>	X	X		X
<i>Advance Equity</i>	X	X	X	X
<i>Make Efficient Decisions</i>	X	X	X	X
<i>Protect Land and Ecosystems</i>	X	X		X
<i>Use Natural Resources Wisely</i>	X	X		X
<i>Expand Housing Opportunities</i>	X	X		
<i>Provide Transportation Choice</i>		X		X
<i>Increase Job and Business Opportunities</i>		X	X	
<i>Promote Clean Energy</i>				
<i>Plan Regionally</i>	X	X	X	X

Part IV: Community Development Priorities

In order to identify and prioritize local needs through a *comprehensive and integrated approach*, the draft FY10 CDS was presented and discussed at a public forum held on December 7, 2009 at 7:30 pm. (See *Public Forum Meeting Minutes* and the public forum handouts.) While discussing the activities and strategies in the CDS, the attendees' attention was called to how the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles related to Rockland's CDS and prioritized activities (see *Table 1*). Rockland held a public hearing on January 4, 2010 to further discuss and review proposed updates to the CDS, review the progress of its current CDBG programs and discuss an application for the FY10 Community Development Fund program. In preparation for this hearing, the CDS was submitted to the Board of Selectmen prior to the meeting and was available on the Town's official website. The Selectmen also solicited input from Town department heads and members of Town boards. At this public hearing, the Board of Selectmen proposed some additional amendments to the CDS and presented two activities for inclusion in the Town's FY10 CDF application. The Board voted to approve the FY10 CDS and submit a multi-activity CDF I application. The following list of community development activities, in order of priority, was developed based on the input of Rockland residents, Town department heads, and the Board of Selectmen.

List of Prioritized Projects/Activities *(with projected timeline):*

1. Establish a positive image for the downtown area as a revitalized and mixed-use center for services, convenience shopping, and in-town residential living by redeveloping vacant parcels and reusing older, industrial buildings, allowing for a mix of uses (e.g., specialty commercial shops, residential uses) and, where appropriate, parking to serve the downtown area. Utilize a variety and mix of financing sources, including private funding, Urban Renewal, MassDevelopment, LISC, PWED, CDAG, CDBG and other public grants. *(continuous)*
2. Extend the town's Economic Target Area Boundary to include Rockland's downtown and industrial areas in order to allow the town to enter into TIF agreements with developers interested in locating within economically distressed areas of town. *(2011)*
3. Direct investment into the downtown's public and private infrastructure as well as commercial, mixed-use and underutilized factory buildings and shopping plazas; encourage rehabilitation of the buildings in order to attract new businesses to the CBD and enhance Rockland's economic base. *(continuous)*
4. Foster appropriate new commercial and industrial development in areas with adequate existing infrastructure to expand the town's tax and job bases. *(continuous)*
5. Monitor economic effects on established commercial districts resulting from the proposed redevelopment of the South Weymouth Naval Air Station (SWNAS). *(continuous)*
6. Develop a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) that identifies, prioritizes and schedules spending on needed capital projects. *(continuous)*
7. Complete and maintain a pavement management plan for the local roadway/street system. *(2012)*
8. Construct a satellite fire station. *(2015)*
9. Relocate the current senior center and youth center into a joint senior/youth center to provide social service programs that will benefit the youth and senior citizen populations of Rockland. *(2020)*
10. Improve and make public facilities accessible (such as schools, municipal buildings and recreational facilities) by utilizing local funds, CDBG, MPPF, EDA, RRD, SBAB, public safety and library grants and loans. *(currently)*
11. Establish a Disability Commission that includes special populations and advocates to ensure that town facilities, services and programs afford equal access to all. *(2010)*
12. Enhance and expand the programs and facilities for the youth, families and seniors within Rockland. *(2012)*
13. Rehabilitate and preserve existing housing stock affordable to low- and moderate-income households. *(currently)*
14. Identify and purchase, or otherwise obtain, open space that can create an "emerald necklace" system of parks throughout Rockland. *(2025)*
15. Partner with adjacent towns to provide regional public transportation services. *(continuous)*
16. Update Town's 10-Year Master Plan. *(2015)*